

Parental Mental Illness: The Effects it has on Children Later on in Life

Although mental illness continues to be at the forefront of many political and social debates there is still a limited amount of research conducted on mental illness and its effects on the family of the person with the mental illness. This talk seeks to fill some of those gaps by answering: What are the effects parental mental illness has on children later on in life, if any at all? By conducting one on one interviews with six women who had a mentally ill parent, undergraduate Communication Studies major Gloria Ruiz was able to help answer this question. With a range of parental mental illnesses including early onset Alzheimer's disease, Bipolar disorder, and alcohol and substance abuse, each woman's narrative offered a unique perspective on parental mental illness. Even though each account was different and individual to the participant, interwoven in many of the stories were three themes. The lived experiences of these women were compiled and the results found that affected children were fearful of vulnerability in relationships, conflict avoidant when discussing a conflict with a friend or significant other, and that speaking about their mentally ill parent was a very emotionally triggering experience for them. This talk can be beneficial to affected children and others helping to foster effective communication while also helping on a broader societal level by spreading awareness of parental mental illness and the effects it has not only on the person battling the mental illness but their children as well.